The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War by Brian McAllister Linn. Harvard University Press, 2007, 320 pp., $27.95.

The events of 11 September 2001 demonstrated anew that we live in a dangerous world and that the United States is not immune from its threats. That tragic day forced Americans to confront new perils and contemplate how to respond. What issued from that period of reflection was an unwelcome addition to our lexicon: the global war on terrorism (GWOT).

Yet despite the omnipresence of the GWOT, there is still no consensus over its ultimate meaning, even among America's military leadership. Who is the enemy in the current GWOT? Are we really fighting a tactic—terrorism—and not an organization? How does one fight a GWOT? How will we know if we have won? The notion is so vague that military officers at the highest ranks have failed to coalesce behind a definition.

In truth, the American military community had been engaged in a bitter debate over the very concept of war well before 9/11. Those individuals charged with fighting war seemed to no longer know what the term meant. Explaining why this confusion reigns and how it has affected the way in which America has approached armed conflict is the goal of Brian McAllister Linn's *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War.* A professor of history at Texas A&M University, Linn has established himself as one of the country's leading interpreters of its military history. In this important and readable book, he ably captures and dissects the history of this debate as well as its consequences for past, current, and future military policy. He argues that if there is an American way of war, it is due to the efforts of military thinkers during peacetime, not military leaders during wartime.

Linn identifies three martial philosophies that have competed for the heart and mind of the Army and its approach to land warfare since the early days of the republic. These three groups differ from each other in fundamental ways. The eldest group, the "Guardians," view warfare as more science than art. Enamored of technology and focused on protecting the homeland, Guardians believe war is governed by scientific principles and thus predictable to a degree. If applied properly, these principles should all but guarantee victory, regardless of what the enemy does. Linn traces the heritage of Guardians from advocating coastal defense in the nineteenth century to promoting a missile defense shield in the twenty-first century.

In contrast are the "Heroes," who attempt to reduce war to its essence. To emerge victorious in combat requires soldiers who embody the warrior ethos—honor, loyalty, bravery, and military genius. The Heroic school stresses the human element in conflict: troops win wars, not weapons. George S. Patton is emblematic of this tradition.

"Managers" comprise the third tradition. They take an organizational approach to warfare. Unconcerned with small conflicts, Managers believe that modern war requires experts able to mobilize the full resources of a nation. George C. Marshall and Dwight D. Eisenhower are representative of this tradition.

Although convinced of the correctness of their approach to war, disciples of the three martial philosophies have habitually failed to forecast the location and nature of future wars. They focused on fighting the war they wanted, not the war the country ultimately fought. To compound the initial, each group rationalized its failure on forces outside of its control. All three groups agreed on only one thing: the civilian leadership did not support the Army sufficiently.

This unwillingness to face unpleasant facts has clouded the Army's thinking about what it must do to prepare for future conflicts. Instead of studying the Vietnam War or the Somalia intervention, the post–Cold War US Army remained fixated on refighting the Second World War or the First Gulf War; however, preparing to fight a large-scale conventional battle on the plains of Europe did little good for an army that would be sent to Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, and Somalia—trouble spots for which it was ill-prepared.

Linn pulls no punches when dispensing criticism of recent military leaders. Among those he takes to the woodshed are GENs Ricardo S. Sanchez and Tommy Franks. Sanchez was in charge during the "lost year" in Iraq. Both the Abu Ghraib scandal and the eruption of civil war happened on his watch. Linn writes that Franks bullied his staff and attacked his critics but capitulated to Donald Rumsfeld on the most important issues. Franks sought to take credit for military victories in Afghanistan and Iraq while denying any responsibility for the disarray that followed.

After seven chapters describing the hubris of many military thinkers, Linn ends on an optimistic note. He writes that BG Volney J. Warner, the deputy commandant, US Army Command and General Staff College, has revamped an out-of-date curriculum in response to the Iraq War. The Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute also garners praise. Its faculty has produced numerous studies critical of America's approach in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the poorly named GWOT. And despite grumblings from influential civilian and uniformed voices, the Army's leadership has shielded and supported these authors. Linn also gives high marks to GEN David H. Petraeus, who he says has put together a first-rate staff that accepts guidance from a variety of sources, both inside and outside the government.

As America's armed forces struggle to adapt to unconventional warfare, they would do well to consider this thoughtful and timely book. It punctures the cocoon of certainty in which some military intellectuals have enveloped themselves by documenting their repeated failure to understand previous wars and to anticipate the nature and location of the conflicts in which America would subsequently become involved. Policy makers, academics, and the general public should also appreciate the book, which draws back the curtain on the three intellectual traditions that have governed how the US Army has interpreted its past in an attempt to prepare for the next war. As we have learned the hard way, engaging in selective, self-serving history prevents us from learning from our mistakes and preparing for current and future threats.

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